

Guildford Town Centre Vision questionnaire

1. What are your thoughts on the principle and approach for limiting the environmental impact of Guildford's road network?

This question seems rather loaded. The need to review the town centre, and to use it more efficiently for housing, in the vision, doesn't necessarily mean either losing Bridge Street to traffic (per the MasterVision document), NOR does it necessarily mean the huge cost and the extensive time delay that would arise from a new road adjacent to the railway line on the opposite side from Woodbridge Road (per the separate GVG proposal). It is clear that there is an environmental impact from Guildford's current road network, and that the current level of traffic flow is high; but it is not clear that either of the two proposals will significantly improve it. Nor is this necessarily the most attractive nor the main driver for the need for a town vision.

It is important to recognise that if most new homes are built in the town centre, then the congestion – and environmental damage - will **not** increase markedly overall because there will not be much – relatively - increased road use from those dwellings (town centre dwellers will not routinely use cars to access work, leisure, shopping). However, building approximately an increased population of 25% of the borough, of which 75-80% may be out of town, will, conversely, have a very dramatic impact on town congestion and will cause the environmental impact of Guildford's road network to be affected very adversely. As a result, building out of town is not in the interest of either the current town dwellers nor those who currently live in the countryside. New out of town dwellers will need to get into the car to go anywhere – and cannot just be excluded from the town by park and ride/congestion charging. While such mechanisms may seem superficially attractive to current town dwellers, the town will just grow to become a sprawling and congested suburb, with disparate elements finding transport difficult, and with huge park and rides causing long delays in access to the town centre. A journey that can currently take 15 minutes might take an hour – this will not be feasible or realistic, and will drive shoppers to other centres elsewhere (with a consequential adverse effect on the proposed substantially increased retail offering). Public transport, and use of cycling and walking, are most effective in the context of inner town development, with high design standards and greening of public spaces.

It should be noted that the land use should be efficient, with the priority given to use of existing or potential brownfield land for housing; greening of those public spaces, and high quality open spaces, are desirable, but grain and density along the scale of the existing, smaller scale town centre buildings (as in the High Street) should not lead to either cavernous spaces or large public buildings. The High Street and Guildhall are beautiful and loved- the Friary is universally hated, and the North Street development may be trending in that direction. Large monolithic buildings are not desirable, and it is not clear that huge public spaces are appropriate within the framework of Guildford either.

2. What are your thoughts on the principle and approach for revealing the River Wey?

It is desirable to make much more of the River Wey within the town. It is ridiculous that the town turns its back on one of its most attractive features, and it is clear from the valued area around the Council offices at Millmead, and the Yvonne Arnaud, that the river is precious and should be much more accessible. The mess of industrial and commercial buildings along Walnut Tree Close hide the Wey and they should be removed (with viable businesses relocated to other currently underutilised commercial sites in the borough) and this land should be used for a river path, bordered by residential housing. This could be true on both banks of the Wey, including for example the Arriva bus garage, which currently borders the river and could be beautiful. This redevelopment would reduce congestion, because this housing would be within a short walk, cycle or (for the disabled, elderly or in inclement weather) Hoppa bus ride from both the station and the town centre. As a result the need for these residents to drive to work would be less, and this would have a beneficial impact on traffic. Furthermore, the relocated businesses would no longer require inbound commuting either from customers or from employees, reducing traffic congestion further.

The Farnham Road bus depot should be included in the plans for residential development adjacent to the Wey; this is not currently included in the SHLAA or local plan, but is a site suitable for substantial numbers of attractive, high quality residential units which should be included in the proposals. All the urban sites in the Walnut Tree Close/Woodbridge Meadows area, especially those owned by GBC or Surrey County Council, should be so included.

3. What are your thoughts on the principle and approach for creating more people friendly streets and new public spaces?

This is desirable, but it is also a more equivocal issue. It is emphatically desirable to create new public spaces. But the “people-friendly streets” will not be friendly if they result in increased congestion. It is important to recognise that if most new homes are built in the town centre, then the congestion will **not** increase markedly overall because there will not be much – relatively - increased road use from those dwellings (town centre dwellers will not routinely use cars to access work, leisure, shopping). Public transport, and use of cycling and walking, is most effective in the context of inner town development, with high design standards and greening of public spaces.

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and the North Street development may be tending in that direction. Large monolithic buildings are not desirable, and it is not clear that huge public spaces are appropriate within the framework of Guildford either.

4. What are your thoughts on the principle and approach for creating a compact and well connected town with development that reflects Guildford's historic street pattern?

This is a desirable plan. Guildford's historic streets, with their small grain, the substantial roads of the High Street and North Street and the small lanes and alleys that intersect the two, create a really attractive network for the borough. This is understood and underlined in the Allies & Morrison mastervision and is warmly endorsed. It should also have a bearing on the proposed developments at North Street, which should not be monolithic or overly large in scale, nor should they lose the historic street pattern. It is concerning that a process of demolition of buildings (some of which are historic, or at least 100 years old) has been started without any clear vision of the buildings that are to replace them, and this is of some very considerable concern.

5. What are your thoughts on the principle and approach for providing new homes on underused sites in Guildford?

The town centre development zone around Walnut Tree Close, Woodbridge Meadows and Woodbridge Road is the best possible location for new homes, both in terms of "underused" sites and existing brownfield. In this context underused could be defined as sites that are existing factory or commercial enterprises which could just as validly be sited on commercial sites elsewhere in the borough, (e.g. Slyfield) with less potential congestion, utilising the riverside and the urban centre most effectively for much denser housing, reestablishing the town centre as a residential area and reclaiming therefore the centre for night traffic so that it is not merely a venue for night clubs and bars.

Homes in the centre are better for new residents (who get desirable new accommodation, and because potentially smaller in scale, this is the size of dwelling needed in the borough as affordable homes or for key workers, rather than 4-5 bedroom executive houses). These are also better for existing residents in the town (who have town neighbours rather than derelict factories or deserted car parks). They are also better for existing residents in the outer suburbs (who are less subject to garden grabbing development issues); and better for existing residents in villages and the countryside (who continue to live in the countryside, as they have chosen to do, rather than in a suburb). Such development is better for the whole borough which gets countryside for all and a working, vibrant, living town. No one wants "Edge city" and a sprawl of suburbia from Leatherhead to Aldershot; the plan as it currently stands offers that. With urban usage at a more intensive level, for both town and rural residents, the

situation is improved.

6. What are your thoughts on the Vision's approach to the Town Centre?

The Vision approaches the concept of redevelopment in the town centre intelligently and with sensitivity. It is encouraging to see that the prospect of urban development will allow a reclaiming of the town so that there is much less developmental pressure on the surrounding area, especially Green Belt. The idea of residential development in the town centre is very positive, since this will reduce the congestion of those driving in to the town; most urban residents will not use cars as intensively as rural residents (who need to use their car for almost every journey). The Vision has an appreciation of the historic centre and areas of significance, and for the historic grain of the town, especially for the iconic views into and out of the High Street, which is welcomed.

We have a slight reservation in relation to the emphasis on retail and mixed use as part of urban development. The emphasis for this town centre, and the associated development of North Street which should also be covered by the Town Centre vision, should instead be on predominantly residential, even if there is a retail ground floor component for the most central areas. There are large numbers of vacant shops already in Guildford; the North Street development will change the focus of the retail centre, possibly changing the retail centre of the town from the High Street and the existing North Street shops to a wider area set back from North Street; and this could damage the viability of the existing businesses and the iconic High Street. Similarly, Guildford is already over provided with office space and offices stay vacant for long periods. The viability of the Baker Tilly site is a case in point; it was not viable as offices and has become residential development space. It is therefore appropriate to anticipate that the need for urban residential space should dictate the focus of development.

The priority for the town centre vision should be to use the available brownfield land efficiently in the best interest of the borough and its residents, especially where that land is owned either by Guildford Borough Council or by Surrey County Council. The emphasis on traffic is something of a digression. Guildford does have serious traffic problems, but it is important to recognise that especially with intensive extra urban building these will get worse. The traffic along the A3, or gaining access to or from the A3, at peak periods, is extremely severe. This is unlikely to be resolved with Park & Ride facilities; without extremely efficient public transport (which is not under the control of GBC) it will not be possible to reduce car use in the urban area. In this context, the realignment of the gyratory is perhaps a detail.

Changing the face of the Friary, so that it fronts the street, keeping the urban grain with smaller streets as a cross link between the North Street and High Street east/west links; recognising the importance of sightlines into and out of the historic centres including the castle and the High Street; protecting the views from Dapdune Wharf; these are all facets of the town centre vision that are

welcomed and that we consider should be retained in any future development of the Master vision.

The public statement from Allies & Morrison that they consider that the bulk of new development -especially residential development - could take place in the critical 5 year window is warmly welcomed.

7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?